

Pentecost A, 2011

Text: John 7:37-39

Title: Streams of Living Water

+ INI +

There are two kinds of water.

First, there is living water. Living water means flowing water, water on the move. Rivers and streams, springs and fountains, these are all living water. The water flows from one place to the next, always on the move, always bringing life.

Second, there is dead water. Dead water means stagnant water, water that just sits there. Swamps and marshes, pools and lakes, these are all dead water. The water can easily become a place of death and disease because it is never refreshed. Think of the Dead Sea. The Jordan River flows in, but nothing flows out. The water is salty and stagnant, and nothing can grow there. It's dead.

Jesus promises you today that out of your heart will flow rivers of living water. Living water. The first kind of water.

Jesus speaks these words on the last and greatest day of the feast, that is, the feast of Booths. This was one of the three great pilgrim feasts of Judaism, held in the fall around the time of the grape harvest. People would come to Jerusalem from all over the country and all over the world to celebrate.

For seven days the people would live outside in tents that they had built to remember their time of wandering in the wilderness.

They remembered how the Lord had cared for them and provided for them in the wilderness. How he fed them and led them for forty years.

Every day of the feast, a certain ritual was performed. The high priest himself would go down to the pool of Siloam in Jerusalem. There he filled a golden pitcher with water and carried it up to the temple.

When the high priest reached the temple, he poured the water out as an offering to the Lord, and all the people sang and rejoiced as they gave thanks to the Lord and remembered how He had provided water for them in the wilderness. They remembered the time when He provided water even from a rock. Flowing water. Living water.

So this is the context for Jesus' words about living water. He speaks these words at the feast, as the people rejoice at God's gift of water.

Jesus begins by saying, "If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink."

Jesus Himself is the source of water to quench your thirst. Just as the Lord provided water to His people who were thirsting in the wilderness, so He provides His life-giving water to you.

That life-giving, living water flows to you in Baptism. There your sins are drowned like the evildoers in the days of Noah, or like Pharaoh and the Egyptians in the Red Sea. The water kills your sinful self and brings you new birth, new life.

That is what we've been hearing about this past Easter through St. Peter- all the blessings of baptism- from our new birth into a living hope, to being built into the God's holy house, to being ready to give an answer, to rejoicing in suffering, to resisting the devil.

And yet baptism isn't the end of our life in Christ, it is only the beginning. You cannot say, "I've been baptized, I don't need God's grace and blessing," any more than you can say, "I had a drink of water today, I don't need to drink ever again."

Jesus continues to provide His living water. It flows through His word, and through His gifts of absolution and Supper. Every week in the Divine Service and every day in your daily devotions the Lord quenches your thirst with His refreshing grace and mercy.

Like the Israelites of old, you are living in a wilderness. After a long day or week out there in the world you are parched, thirsting for refreshment. Your strength and energy is drained away by the hopelessness, the fear, and the anger that are raging outside these walls. And so you are here today to be refreshed, renewed.

But that is not all. Jesus does not stop with verse 37 and His call to come to Him and drink. Jesus' water is living water, water on the move, water that flows from place to place. Instead, Jesus continues with verse 38, "Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, 'Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.'"

That's you. You have faith, you believe, and so out of your heart will flow rivers of living water.

The water that flows into you is designed to flow out of you. You are a river or stream, you are not a stagnant swamp.

And that's where Pentecost fits into all of this.

Easter was the end of the Jesus-story; it was the beginning. Today we heard how the story kept going, how the living water kept flowing.

The Holy Spirit filled the apostles and inspired them to stand and boldly proclaim the good news of Jesus' resurrection to the crowds who had gathered to celebrate Pentecost.

Here Jesus' words and promises were fulfilled. From the hearts of the apostles flowed the streams of living water to people from all over the world. They were refreshed, forgiven, and baptized that day.

And it didn't stop there. The living water kept flowing. As each believer returned home, the living water flowed through each of them to bring God's grace, His living water across the globe.

And even to you. God's living water has flowed to you through the parents who raised you, through the pastors who baptized you, confirmed you and communed you, through the Sunday school and VBS teachers who taught you, through so many different rivers and streams and channels.

And it will not stop with you. Living water is flowing water, alive and on the move. You are not a stagnant swamp, but a bubbling fountain of life.

You do not need to go to the four corners of the earth to find people parched and thirsty for salvation. There are right here in your family, in your neighborhood, among your friends.

Next week is Vacation Bible School. Think of young people that you know who are living in the wilderness and need to be refreshed. Invite them to come along, or come yourself, even if you can only spare an hour or two, that this place might overflow with Jesus' living water.

There are two kinds of water- living water that is active, flowing and on the move, and water that is stale, stagnant and dead.

Jesus fills you with His living water, the first kind. He makes you a fountain of life.